TRANSCRIPT—WILLIAM "BUTCH" DENDY

Interviewee: William "Butch" Dendy

Interviewer: Zoe Rhine

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Transcriber: Alice Helms

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Zoe Rhine: This is Zoe Rhine. I'm a librarian in the North Carolina Room at Pack Library and today is May 9th, 2019, and I'm talking with Butch Dendy today. As a note to be recorded in the transcript, we have interviewed his sister, Cissy Dendy, so there will be some similarities there. Could you just say for the record your name and date of birth?

William Dendy: William B. Dendy. October 4, 1946.

ZR: Were you born in Asheville?

WD: I was conceived in Asheville. I was born in Newark, New Jersey but raised in Asheville. I spent most of my life in Atlanta, Georgia.

ZR: Did you go to elementary school in Asheville?

WD: Yes, I did. Hill Street School. The name has changed now to something else I don't recall, but it's still on Hill Street. It was elementary and middle school.

ZR: I think Isaac Dickson. About the time period you were there?

WD: I was there from, I think, 1952 or ’53 and graduated, I think, in 1960 and went to Stephens-Lee.

ZR: Since we brought up Hill Street, are there any teachers there that stand out?

WD: At Hill Street? Well, several. First of all, the Principal was an outstanding person and I don’t think she’s gotten the recognition and due that she deserves. She basically put that school on the map. The reason I say ‘put it on the map’ is in 1964 when I graduated, they had something that they called Presidential Scholars for the United States, and there were a hundred and some of the best students in the country, and of those students, of course the majority of them were White, but there were about seven or eight Black students. Of the Black students, two had attended Hill Street School during the time I was there. Andrea Williams, she’s now Andrea Williams Lawrence, and a guy by the name of Bill Sinkford.

ZR: Okay. That’s wonderful.

WD: They were both Presidential Scholars. I think Lyndon Johnson was President at that time. Of course they went to Washington and got a lot of recognition and so forth.

ZR: The principal’s name was?

WD: The principal was Rita Lee. She was one of the most important. But the person that I guess I remember most was the first grade teacher I had, she was a family friend. When I entered Hill Street, I was actually living in a part of Asheville that I should have been going to Mountain Street, but my father and my mother, and I guess a whole lot of family friends thought I’d be better off at Hill Street. So they pulled some strings and got me in.

In order to get there every day, since there was no school bus and it was a little further away than I could walk, the first grade teacher that I had, Mrs. Cooper, she and her husband—her husband was driving because she didn’t drive—would pick me up every morning and take me to school. The whole first year I was there, she was the one who picked me up and got me there. I got home a number of different ways, but they got me to school every day.

ZR: Because you were living on—.

WD: On Madison Avenue.

ZR: That would be a long trek. Any other teachers?

WD: I mentioned the girl, Andrea Williams. Her grandmother was my sixth grade teacher. She was Mrs. Hayes. I was close to a lot of teachers. Another one, the name has kind of come up now, Quentin Miller? I think it’s his son that’s the Sheriff, the new Sheriff here. I don’t know if that’s the father or the grandfather that was my teacher. He was my seventh and eight grade teacher, Quentin Miller.

ZR: Did you have lunch at school?

WD: Yes.

ZR: How about books?

WD: We had textbooks that were supplied. Back in those days, the textbooks that we had at the elementary school and the high school were state-approved and they were the same ones that were being used in all of the schools in the district, probably in the state. But, it

was obvious to us that the textbooks that we had had been used previously by White students at some of the White elementary schools. When we got over to Stephens-Lee, we knew that they were textbooks that had been at Lee Edwards. Lee Edwards was the name of the senior high school, the White high school then. And there was another one, David Miller. Those textbooks had been at one of those two schools before they came over to Stephens-Lee.

ZR: I wonder if they were sending older editions, if they got newer editions.

WD: I don’t know if they did or not, but there was one time in high school, when we went through and did a kind of survey to see how many Black people were mentioned in the book, and I think of all the hundreds of people that they mentioned in the history book, there was many six or seven Black folks and they were the ones that you would normally figure out. There was Booker T. Washington, George Washington Carver, Frederick Douglass. The most recent one—because this was before Martin Luther King was assassinated, he was alive and active then but hadn’t become the major historical figure he was, so he wasn’t in there obviously. But there was another guy who was and I can’t remember the name but he was a part of the U.N. and he was instrumental in helping Israel being formed. And there are a lot of schools and places named after him now. And I can’t think of the name but he was in the book.

ZR: I missed when you all took that survey. Was it in elementary or high school?

WD: It was in high school. The teacher that had us doing that, her name was Mrs. G. I. Pierce.

ZR: Gladys Pierce.

WD: Yes. We had a number of Black teachers who taught history and then almost every Black teacher included some Black history in whatever subject matter they were teaching as far as they could. She taught Social Studies among other thing, and we had to have current events and all of that stuff and that brought in not only past history but current history, current events.

ZR: I was curious how much Black history was taught by the Black teachers.

WD: A fair amount of it was taught but it wasn’t necessarily because the state or the city or anybody else was doing it. The teachers over there felt that it was their job to go ahead and do it, some more than others. There was one person I’ll give a shout out to, the bottler of Coca-Cola here, a guy by the name of Paul Warlick. There was a time when Coca-Cola, the southern company I guess, would have comic book-like publications manufactured about once every couple of years or so. They were done in the form of comic books because you had to do the artwork, but they didn’t have necessarily pictures. But what they did, is they would do a Black history type thing and they would feature a lot of Black individuals who a lot of us knew about, but a lot of people that we didn’t know about. In order to supplement what wasn’t given to us in the state-approved textbooks, we got these comic books from Coca-Cola. Now a lot of the southeastern Coca-Cola bottlers were kind of mandated to get them and pass them out to customers and things like that. A lot of Southern bottlers didn’t want to do it. They got them because Coke said you had to do it, but they just set them in the warehouse. So Warlick would actually pay to have them brought in from Alabama and Georgia and Mississippi

and places where they weren’t using them and then we would take them here and distribute them to Sunday Schools, Kindergartens, Day Care Centers. Some of them even came to the Pack Square Library and at that time the Black library was located in the YMI building, so most of them went there. And then a lot of people, anybody that wanted them, could get them. Teachers, elementary school teachers, etcetera. But he got those for us and we used those as supplemental material. Even though it was done in the form of a comic book, it was not done as purely entertainment It was humorous, it had some real history in it. I think I read in one of those a story about a Black woman who was with NASA at that time, and this was before the moon shot and everything like that, but they were sending astronauts off into outer space and they had these Black women who were known as computerists. I never heard anything like that before until I saw it in the comic book and they had a little bio of one of the women and said she went to Allen, which was a local school, so I called my sister and I said, ‘Do you know this woman that helped with the space launches and that stuff?’ I don’t know if she knew at that time or not but a lot of folk didn’t know it but now everybody knows because there’s been a movie about it. But the first time I heard about it was in that comic book.

ZR: Fascinating. What year, again, did you start at Stephens-Lee?

WD: I started in 1960 and finished in ’64.

ZR: Sixty-four. Okay. That was right during the heft of the civil rights.

WD: Yes, in fact I didn’t participate in a lot of the civil rights stuff directly and part of the reason for it was because my father worked at Biltmore Forest Country Club in a fairly prominent position there, and he never told us that we couldn’t participate in civil

rights, he just said, ‘You don’t need to be on the six o’clock news.’ So we had to play it cool. So I was kind of a logistics person, rather than walk around with placards and signs and stuff like that, when they were doing the boycotts and picketing and all that. There was one civil rights person, a guy by the name of Rowland, I can’t remember his first name but he was a Black businessman in a jewelry store downtown, so he was pretty much self-sufficient, independent and he knew no one was going to come in and bomb him because his building was right next door to the City Police and Fire Department and if they bombed his store, they would have gotten the Police Department and the Fire Department. But he was also very—what’s the word—he was a little apprehensive about the fact that he might be under surveillance and all that. So before they would have meetings down there, and I think the group was called ASCORE, which was a kind of derivation of SCORE, loosely affiliated with the national Congress of Racial Equality, which Floyd McKissick, I think, was head of at that time, another local. Anyway, I would go in early and basic telephones, the dial things, he was worried that his phone might be tapped or there might be bugs in there listening. So I would go through there with him since I had a little bit of electronic expertise and knew about that stuff. Even when I was in high school and elementary school. I’d go through to see whether or not his phone was bugged and whether there were mics in picture frames in the bathrooms. And then when they actually had one of the major boycotts on Tunnel Road in the 1960s, I forget exactly which one it was, but I know I was partially responsible for that starting. They had all of these fast food places out there and McDonald’s had just located out there maybe a year or so earlier, and a Burger King had opened up. When Burger King opened up, the guy that ran it opened up and served Blacks and Whites equally, but Burger King at that time

was franchised out of Atlanta and somehow the word got back to Atlanta that he wasn’t following the rules and they said, ‘You either have to put in a separate space for Black customers, like separate windows or separate seating, or you can’t serve them.’ And he didn’t want to do it but since he didn’t have the money to go ahead and do all these extra things, he went on and segregated too. So that made some of us mad and one day in school several of us decided that we were going to leave school rather than eat lunch and go out on Tunnel Road and get a hamburger. We went to McDonald’s and at that time the McDonald’s was a little shed-like thing with a big arch that was was the major part of it but there was enough room in there for them to have some supplies and maybe three or four workers. You did not go inside the place, you walked up to a little window under a little shed, a cover, and ordered your food. So we went there. I was with a fellow by the name of George Bishop, his father was the first Black Deputy Sheriff for Asheville. Another friend, a guy by the name of Richard Wilkins, another friend, a guy by the name of Martin Baird, B-A-I-R-D, and myself. George had an old Chevy convertible and we drove that up there and pulled in the lot and walked up to the window and there were a couple of White ladies, young women maybe in their early twenties, and we walked up to the window and placed the order and they acted like, ‘I don’t know if we should take it or not.’ Some people on Tunnel Road were starting to serve folks, they just didn’t make a big deal out of it. But these folks kind of looked back at the manager and it was a little White guy who was maybe in his young twenties, I guess he was the manager. And they looked over and he said, ‘You got a problem over here?’ And they just pointed at us and he walked up and said, ‘What do you all want?’ And Martin Baird was the first one in line and he said, ‘I’d like a cheeseburger, french fries and a chocolate milk shake.’ And

this guy said, ‘We don’t serve niggers here.’ And Martin said, ‘And we don’t eat then,’ and grabbed the guy, because he was at the window, grabbed him by his lapel and started banging his head down on the counter. And the women were freaking out. They didn’t have an alarm system or anything in there but they were running around, there was a little phone, kind of like a princess phone on the wall and they knocked it off the wall trying to make a call to the police department and there was pandemonium in there while Martin was banging this guy down. He wasn’t really hurting him because it was a plywood counter, but it was making a lot of noise and sounded bad. And George and Richard and I were basically telling him, ‘Okay man, let’s go, let’s go.’ We didn’t call any names because we didn’t want to identify him. ‘Let’s go, let’s get out of here.’ So Martin let him go and we all jumped in the car and we weren’t sure it was going to start so we had parked it so we could get a rolling start if we had to and we could hear sirens coming through Beaucatcher Tunnel. Evidently the call had gotten out and the police were coming from downtown but they were a good ways away. The McDonald’s there was down there—you remember a place called Buck’s Restaurant? It was real near Buck’s Restaurant. We decided instead of going back through the tunnel we were going to go the other way, and then we went through Kenilworth and came back and snuck back on campus. So when we got back on campus, we told a bunch of folks what had happened and everything and then that evening it was a news story on there and then Mr. Rowland and Pierce and some other folks said, ‘Well we’ve got to do something about this. Enough’s enough.’ And that’s when they decided to go in and have the formal boycott on Tunnel Road where they were going after basically to get all of the businesses to comply. This was before the Accommodations Act. It was in the process of being done but it was

not law yet. So we were just going to take all of them to task but they decided they were going to eye certain businesses and picket them and so forth. So again, I wasn’t part of the picketers. My sister, I understand, she did picket. I don’t remember her there but she said she did. But logistics wise, this was in the day before people had trucks and vans and station wagons and things like that where they could carry a lot of people and a lot of signage and all that stuff but we needed some way to be able to get the materials out there, the water stations, because you weren’t going to go inside anywhere to get any water, nobody was going to accommodate you. So Mr. Belton was the principal of Stephens-Lee and I was a student there at that time and we had a station wagon, the school had a station wagon, all city schools had station wagons. All of them were Ford Fairlane station wagons and they had the name of the school on the side. So I asked him if we could borrow the station wagon and he said, ‘Yes.’ But I put a sign over the thing on the side, but anyone who really wanted to could get the license plate. But I had a sign over the thing so you couldn’t instantly tell it was a Stephens-Lee wagon. But I was running supplies back and forth from downtown to the marches on Tunnel Road, picking up people and taking them someplace where they could use a restroom, caring the water, all that kind of stuff. So I did the logistics stuff.

ZR: So it involved picketing and marching on the road?

WD: Yes, they had picketers, people with signs and banners and all that, and they were marching across the entry ways to the parking lot, so most people did not want to confront, they would just go by and go somewhere where there wasn’t any. But a few folks, a few hardcore folks like the folks in Charlottesville, if they saw a bunch of folks in there, they’d just turn and run and everybody would just let them on in, so nobody got

hurt, but there were very few of those. The one place that we didn’t picket and boycott was Buck’s. A lot of people went, ‘Well why wouldn’t you do Buck’s?’ Buck’s was officially segregated but it was one of the few places where really late at night, you could get something to eat and Buchanan had Black folks that drove cabs or a few folks on the City Police, George Bishop with the Sheriff’s Department, a few folks that worked late jobs for White folks, and these folks would go into Buck’s. You couldn’t stay there and eat your food, and nobody really wanted to because it was a drive-in and he had all kinds of stuff out there in the parking lot and then that restaurant. But you could go in, and if you went in there, he would serve you. So we figured, ‘Okay, we would like to have the full privileges there but at least he was making an effort.’ So when they were talking about who we should boycott, I said, ‘Well, Buchanan is doing this and Buchanan is doing that.’ And I knew him from him being a friend of my father’s and we used to go out there as a family and get food all the time before we’d go to the drive-in movies, just because we wanted to get something. We’d go up, in fact my father would call and order it and then we’d go by, run up to the thing, you had to go up some stairs into the area where they prepared the food and pick it up. They had it ready for you and you’d take it. So I had a way of going in there, since I knew the routine, I would go in there sometimes on my own and as far as Buck knew I was getting it for my father. But he still took care of me. And on occasion when I was at Stephens-Lee after I started driving, several teachers I would give rides home, Miss Inez Clark for one, and Miss Mamie Eubanks was another. They didn’t drive and I would give them rides home but on the way I would ask them if they were hungry, did they want something to eat, and most of the time they’d say, ‘Yes.’ So I would take them to Buck’s and get them something to eat. They’d say,

‘How are you getting food out here where they don’t serve Black folks?’ I said, ‘Aw, if you know how to ask them.’ So I would get food for them, and then there was a place downtown, I think it was D and W, S and W, something like that, off of Pritchard Park, and a real close family friend, we called him ‘Uncle’ but he wasn’t related to us by blood, ( ) and there were a lot of Blacks that went in there but they weren’t going in there to get service for themselves necessarily, they were going in there for their employers and there were a lot of folks that lived in apartments downtown and they would send Black workers to go get their meals and it was a buffet type thing, you walked in and you looked in the window or glass and you’d tell them to serve your food and they’d put it in a styrofoam type of takeout and you’d pay for it and leave. So many Blacks went in there to get food for White employers, that it didn’t necessarily raise an eyebrow if some Black folk went in there to get their own stuff. But you kind of had to know what the deal was. If they didn’t recognize you then you might have an issue. So you didn’t want to cause a problem. I would sometimes take the teachers, before I’d take them home, I’d take them to Bucks to get something to eat and sometimes I’d take them to S and W and order some real food. I got over pretty well with those teachers and it was important that I got over with Miss Eubanks because she was the Spanish teacher and I was a foreign language major. You had to either take French—we had French and Spanish at Stephens-Lee. You had to have either French or Spanish to graduate and I was never very good at learning a language. I could communicate with it, I got to the point where I could listen and understand it but I couldn’t really talk. But she tutored me so she helped me get over so I passed Spanish. Otherwise I would have flunked it in high school. And then Miss Clark was the English teacher, Inez Clark, and —-.

ZR: We’ve got the Stephens-Lee 1964 Annual here, that we’re looking at.

WD: And she would tutor me in English and English was important in a number of different ways, getting in college and that kind of stuff. Between her and there was a neighbor of ours, a lady by the name of Lucy Herring, who was always doing a kind of experiment and I was one of her guinea pigs, lab rats, like that. Before they moved out, Mrs. Ann Tolliver who was an English teacher was tutoring me.

ZR: And they lived right near you.

WD: They lived right next door in fact. So when I went to college I was in pretty good shape. In fact when I took the SAT I got the highest SAT score of any Black student at Stephens-Lee and in fact it was so high that—we had to take our SAT test at David Miller, so it was Lee Edwards, David Miller, and Stephens-Lee and Allen, all taking them at the same place. And my scores were so high that when they graded them, they sent them over to Lee Edwards because they didn’t think a Black student would score that high. It took me about a month to find my SATs. The young lady, Andrea Williams who I told you was a presidential scholar, she was expected to be the one to—but she got in and got a bad case of nerves, so she kind of wiped out the first time she took it. She took it a second time and did way better. But I bested her in that particular time, so that was the one time that I—. We were both friends, grew up, her mother and my mother were friends. I knew her grandmother, her grandmother was my sixth grade teacher and taught my sister and my brother. So Andrea was a good friend, family friend, playmate. Andrea and I were born just a few days apart, and the mothers used to get together and compare notes about who was doing this or that. They would say, ‘Well, Butch,’ Butch was my

nickname, ‘Butch is sitting up now and starting to talk,’ and Andrea’s mother would say, ‘Andrea’s starting to read now.’ It was always something. I was starting to walk and Andrea was riding a bike. She was always ahead until that one time that I bested her. And she went on to Spelman College. I was at Morehouse, she was at Spelman. Her mother was the secretary to the President down there, Dr. Manley, who was also a former Stephens-Lee alum, not an alum but I think he had been principal there at one time and he was also faculty. The name was Manley, Albert Manley.

ZR: Yes, he was a principal.

WD: He was the first Black president of Spelman College and he was there during the time that I was in school and Andrea was in school. So her mother was his secretary, and she later got promoted to the Registrar for the college. Andrea went on to be the head of the Computer Science Department at Spelman. She’s retired now. She stayed in Atlanta.

ZR: You’ve talked about so many things. Can I just think here a minute? You’re the first person I talked to directly who had so much experience with ASCORE and the work they did. When you were picketing at McDonald’s or any of those places, did the police come by?

WD: They would ride by occasionally but they didn’t hassle us or bother us. I think if anybody had done anything like blocking traffic on Tunnel Road, doing something like that then it would have been an issue. Essentially, we went to these—I didn’t go to that many of them, but the students had to go to these training courses, when you were in high school and in college, Whether you were part of SNCC, or you were part of ASCORE, whether you are part of whatever. You had to go to these non-violent orientation sessions

where they told you what to expect, how to behave, and most of the folks did what they did. You had a certain place, if that was a sidewalk or a curb space, that you could occupy and that’s where you stayed. But you were there in such large numbers that a lot of people didn’t want to come in and do business and that was the motivation to get folks to decide that they were going to negotiate.

ZR: You all were pretty young then. Were you afraid?

WD: No, I think we were too young to be scared. We weren’t in the deep part of the south where so much of the horrendous stuff was going on. Actually, back in those days, Asheville was probably a little more kinder and gentler than it is now if you want to know the truth of it. The fact was, so many Black folks worked for White folks who were important and these Black folks were very important parts of these folks extended families and businesses that if you had a problem as a Black person, with a White person, usually it would be a blue collar person or somebody lower. You didn’t necessarily have to get in their face and get mad, you could just simply talk to their boss or somebody like that and they would deal with it. so there wasn’t a whole lot of stuff that was going on in Asheville like it was other places. If you made somebody really mad, then usually somebody would come and tell you, ‘Okay, you done messed up now, you messed with one of Mr. So-and-so’s Negroes and you’re in deep do-do now.’

ZR: Were you aware of any other maybe more radical groups during that time? Like Black Panthers.

WD: In Asheville? There were people that empathized or sympathized with them, but there wasn’t any major stuff. ASCORE, which Rowland, and then you had some of the

faculty people like Miss Pierce, were active in operating that. You had people that were doing other things like with Urban League, with NAACP. There was a prominent attorney by the name of Ruben Daly who was very involved in stuff like that. They basically did everything by the book, so when the schools desegregated around here there wasn’t a bunch of marching and all that kind of stuff. They just sent word one day to some people and said, ‘Okay, you’re going to be transferred over to such-and-such.’ In fact the first two Black students at Lee Edwards were my younger brother, Edward Thomas Dendy, and Mr. Lacy Haith’s son, Tommy Haith. So Tommy Haith and Edward Dendy were the first two students at Lee Edwards and they were the first two to graduate.

ZR: So they went there prior to the Asheville integration?

WD: Integration started in North Carolina in the early sixties, but it started with the first grades and they did one or two grades a year. It was first and second grade this year and then year it was third and fourth and fifth and sixth. But the time I was in high school, they were just starting to get to it. My brother was a freshman in high school, I was a senior, and they pulled him out so that his sophomore and junior and senior years he had to go what was Lee Edwards.

ZR: But Stephens-Lee was still open.

WD: Yes, Stephens-Lee was still open. They pulled him out of Stephens-Lee but they were in the process of getting ready to transfer Stephens-Lee over to a new school that was built on French Broad. That was supposed to be an integrated high school and a lot of White parents protested. ‘We don’t want to send our students to a colored school,’ and some of them said worse stuff than that. So some White parents said, ‘We don’t want to

send our kids,’ so they decided they wouldn’t put Stephens-Lee on that name of the school on French Broad, they were just going to make it something generic, so it became South French Broad. And then later they changed the name from Lee Edwards to Asheville High, and some folks said Asheville Central High. So that was kind of the reason for that. Black folks said, ‘You all don’t want to send your kids to a school named after a Black person, we’re not going to send our kids to a school named after a White person.’ But that’s about as controversial as it got.

ZR: I didn’t know that they were initially going to make that integrated. Do you think they picked those two students—I can see why, knowing the parents—.

WD: I don’t know exactly why they picked them but there were meetings where they had Ruben Daly and a number of prominent ministers and I guess they decided who would be the most likely to be successful and who would make the best impression race-wise. So Edward was picked to be one and Tommy Haith was the other one. They were the first two.

ZR: I assume you and your brother talked about what it was like?

WD: He was a little miffed because most of his friends were still at the Black high school. They would have left Stephens-Lee and they would have gone over to South French Broad. So he was a little miffed about losing some of his friends but he took it in stride.

ZR: Did he feel like he was getting treated okay?

WD: I’m sure there were some times when he didn’t but he always had a pretty good—got along with White kids. In fact he had some White friends before he even went to Lee Edwards. In fact he worked out at Biltmore Forest Country Club so he knew some kids from there, from at the club. So he didn’t have serious, serious problems. I just know he missed the kind of stuff we were doing at Stephens-Lee. The band, Black football program and basketball. He didn’t have that experience but one year and he kind of missed it being over at Lee Edwards.

ZR: Were you in the band at Stephens-Lee?

WD: I was for a brief period of time. By first year there, you were required to go to these band camps that Mr. Lennon would have at his home, in the back yard. He also required that you had to learn to read music in a certain amount of time. I didn’t read music. I could play the drums fairly well because I had played in a band that they had at Hill Street that Quentin Miller was head of. So I went into the band because a bunch of people I knew went in the band. If you weren’t an athlete then band members got the next highest amount of prestige. So I went in there for a while but I was not really learning to read the music but I kind of cheated on it. What happened is that Mr. Lennon would give us sheet music a week before we supposed to start playing something, so we could get familiar with it. So rather than learn the sheet music, I would go to Dunham’s Music and this was mostly classical music, I would go to the classical section and buy records and listen to them. They treated you kind of special when you were buying classical stuff. They had a room in the back where they had overstuffed chairs and one of the drink things where you could get soft drinks out of this cold thing. And they had coffee for you and every now and then they’d even have some snacks. So whereas the kids that were

going in there buying Elvis Presley records had to stand up in something like a little telephone booth and put some rinky-dink headphones on, they had a big sound system in the back that was state of the art. You could sit there and put your record on and listen to it. So I’d listen to stuff and say, ‘Okay, I’ve got the gist of this.’ And I decided that I liked classical music. So since I had a fair amount of income because I was working at Biltmore Forest and doing some other things, I would actually just buy the records. By the time I went to college I probably had as good a classical music collection as anybody in the city of Asheville. In fact I used to go to people’s homes, like the guy by the name of General Lynch who was into classical music and was a member at Biltmore Forest and listen to classical music over at his house and I would carry stuff over there and there were several other people in town I would go to and they were surprised that there was this Black kid that had so much interest in classical music. And I really did like it because my mother was into classical music and she kind of got all of us into it, but I guess I was the most serious. I like all kinds of music; jazz, classical, rock and roll, rhythm and blues, all that stuff.

ZR: Did Doc Lennon ever catch on to what you were—.

WD: Yes, he finally caught on because one day, I would be playing sometimes and put a note—. I played percussion and we had all kinds off percussion instruments. We had more stuff than I think some of the White schools. We had tympani and gongs and all that stuff. He really liked classical music and wanted to have an orchestra but we didn’t have any strings in the high school band so he had the reed section basically trying to play the same type stuff that the strings would be playing. And then everybody else did what they did. So, we’d go through a piece and everybody made mistakes the first time or two but

after that, everybody was supposed to be right on point. Occasionally I would hit something, I’d put a note or something in there that I remembered from one of the records but it wasn’t on the sheet music that he’d given us and he would stop and say, ‘Now that wasn’t in there but I kind of like that so make a notation.’ But ultimately he caught on and one day I was the only percussionist in there for practice. Everybody else for some reason was out. I was on percussion and it was obvious that I didn’t know what I was doing. I couldn’t read the music. So he finally stopped, turned around and was very quiet and he looked at me and said, ‘Mr. Dendy, you don’t know how to read music, do you?’ I looked at him and said, ‘No, Mr. Lennon.’ And he said, ‘Well, I’m sorry, you know the drill.’ So I had to pick up my drum sticks, because you own your own drumsticks, and leave. And that was it. I left the band midway through my freshman year of high school. But I didn’t miss it. I went on to some other things. But I still like my classical music and kept on collecting it right on up until I got sick in Atlanta and wound up having to get rid of all my hi-fi and stereo and that kind of stuff before I moved up here.

ZR: Were you in any other clubs?

WD: In high school? I was in the Audio-Visual Club and the person who was over that was a guy by the name of Cowan. The reason I got into Audio-Visual is because at Hill Street we didn’t really have an Audio-Visual Club but we did have some audio-visual equipment because Miss Lee would get stuff from people who would donate stuff and then she’d raise money and go out and buy stuff. It was up to the faculty people to teach us to use their own stuff or arrange to get somebody to use it for them. So I came into the first grade already knowing how to use a record player because we had record players at

home, we had a sixteen millimeter movie projector believe it or not because my father was a professional golfer at one time and they had made news reel stuff of him playing golf when he was participating in tournaments. So we had black and white film and that stuff so I knew how to use a sixteen millimeter movie projector. Knew how to operate a TV because we had a TV since before I went to high school, before I went to elementary school. I’m trying to think of other stuff, some of the other stuff was fairly easy to figure out, like a film strip projector. So when I went into the first grade, Mrs. Cooper, my first grade teacher, used a lot of A-V, or tried to use a lot of A-V, so she made me her audio-visual specialist and some of the other teachers found out that I could do it so I got dismissed from class to go help them with their A-V stuff. I figured, ‘This is a pretty good way to get out of class.’ So I mastered all of the stuff that they had in equipment there, the opaque projector, the overhead projector, which was a fairly new thing back in that day, and whenever a teacher wanted to do something then they’d have to get me out of class to go do it. So that meant I missed all the other stuff. I didn’t miss any major tests or anything, I missed a whole lot of stuff that I didn’t necessarily want to be there for. So when I got to high school, I immediately looked for the Audio-Visual people. Mr. Cowan was the head of that and I went in that and did the same thing. And then I worked the same thing. If I knew there was going to be something in class that I wasn’t prepared for, I knew the films that they would have and I would go to somebody and say, ‘Miss so-and-so has a film on such-and-such and you might want to use it in your class.’ And she’d say, ‘Oh, can I get it?’ And I’d say ‘Well, as long as Miss so-and-so isn’t using it, yes.’ So she would call Mr. Cowan and say, ‘I want to get such-and-such film in my class. Can somebody come show it?’ And he’d say, ‘Dendy can do it.’ So I’d get out of

class and go ahead and do it. So I missed a lot of class legitimately because I was doing Audio-Visual. I never dreamed that that was going to be my career but ultimately when I went to college, I got involved with the person—we didn’t have an Audio-Visual Department at Morehouse when I started there, we had the person who was in charge of the foreign language lab had to do that kind of stuff. And that was when video recordings started to come out, Ampex was a company was that was making it and some of the Japanese companies were starting to come out with it. I was already knee-deep in audio recording. By the time I went to college I owned three or four tape recorders myself as a teenager. So I knew how to do reel-to-reel tape recording in my sleep so when the video recorders came in and nobody at school knew what to do with them, I went in and figured it out. The only difference is that instead of speakers, you hook up a TV set to it and look at it and listen to it. So I became the Audio-Visual person there and when I graduated, that same person along with the person at another school—because Morehouse was part of a consortium of Black schools that were all located right next to each other. It was Spelman College, Morehouse College, a school called Clark College, Atlanta University, and Morris Brown College, all five historically Black colleges and all right next to each other and in some cases they shared some of the same facilities. When I graduated, I was called that summer to ask if I wanted to come back and be head of the Audio-Visual Department for all of the schools because they had just gotten a federal grant, a Title III grant, and they needed someone to come in and head it up and several of the people that were involved in the program knew me and knew I had the skills so they said, ‘Well, can we get Dendy to come back and do it?’ So I got called and I was just getting ready to—agonizing over whether I was going to take a position with General Motors because I had

been given a job at GM and was doing an internship at Parkland Chevrolet at that time with Robert Hunter who owned it then. The guy whose name is kind of prominent around here, Irving Reuter. R-e-u-t-e-r. He’s got a Salvation Army building named after him, I think he’s donated stuff to the Y and to local hospitals. He was a vice-president of General Motors. I remember him at Biltmore Forest and back when I thought I wanted to be in the automobile business, I wanted to design automobiles, he kind of took me under his wing and said, ‘Well, it’s not the case now but by the time you’re ready to do it, it may be happening. But this is what you need to do. You need to do this and that.’ And I had a little bit of artistic ability but I wasn’t a great artist, but I could draw cars. Most kids thought they could draw cars, but I could draw some pretty decent cars. I did not have a great math background and he kept saying, ‘You’ve got to get math because if you’re going to be in automobiles, you’ve got to be one of three things: you can be in finance, you can be in engineering, you can be in creation, which is sculpture, art and stuff like that, you know, design. If you want to do that, then you’re going to have to pick up on these things.’ So, I kind of fussed around in it, I didn’t do it like I should have so I was not prepared when I came out of high school or college to really go into it. So I decided to shift gears and instead of going into the part where you’re going to be in engineering and design and stuff, to go into the promotion part of it. So I said, ‘I want to go into advertising,’ and when I was in college that’s what I was preparing myself for. You had to be a business major to be in advertising in undergraduate school because they didn’t really teach advertising at the undergraduate level. One of the schools in that consortium was a college and I got permission to go over and take graduate courses while I was in college and got credit for them. So when I came out, General Motors, Chrysler

and Ford were starting to actively recruit Black folks from Black colleges and they came down and I thought Chrysler was going to pick me up because I was working with Glover Motors in Asheville which was a Chrysler Plymouth dealership. I was actually selling cars, not out of the dealership but was going out and getting prospects and bringing them in and bringing customers to him. So I was in pretty good with the staff at Glover Motors so when Chrysler had this gas turbine car that was on tour back in the mid-sixties, they thought that was going to be the next big thing in automotive. They built about fifty or sixty gas turbine cars and then sent them all over the country for people to test drive and one came through Asheville and I got to take one out and drive it. And I was just a seventeen, eighteen-year-old kid and I was out there driving a car which in that day was probably worth a half million dollars. By myself. In fact when I drove it, I went through town because it sounded like a jet airplane so I wanted to hear with the windows down, going between the buildings and stuff, and people were hanging out of the buses, ‘What is that?’ and I said, ‘It’s a gas turbine, it’s a Chrysler.’ Some folks looked at it and said, ‘Is that a new Thunderbird?’ It looked kind of like a Thunderbird but it was Chrysler’s version. You can probably Google it and look at it. Jay Leno has one know that’s operating. All of them were the same, black roof with a gold or copper-colored exterior and then a multi-tone interior. Anyway, when I left the dealership, they said, ‘Well you can take it out but you need to come back in fifteen minutes because there’s a whole bunch of people that want to drive it.’ So I decided to go out and we didn’t have the expressway in Asheville then, they were just starting to build it. The main highway was either the Smoky Park Highway going west over the bridge, going out west, or you go out the tunnel and go out 70. So I decided to go out that way and by the time I got to the

Smoky Park bridge, I must have had about twenty cars behind me including a couple of police cars. So that meant I couldn’t light it up to see how fast it would go but I drove all the way out and then finally pulled into the parking lot and turned around because I knew I had to get back.

ZR: Well, Butch, I need to interrupt you. I have so many more things I want to talk to you about and questions but we’ve talked over an hour so will you promise me that we can continue this conversation as soon as possible?

WD: I’d be glad to.

ZR: I’ll probably stop and listen to it again. You have an incredible memory and it’s a joy because you are just making it so real for me. I didn’t come here until seventy-six.

WD: So you are a newbie.

ZR: My mother’s family—.

WD: But you own Asheville now.

ZR: Right. But I also want to, just before I turn the recorder off, I totally messed up and meant to ask you your parents’ names and I didn’t because I feel like I know them already.

WD: My mother was Marjorie McClain Dendy. My father was John Brooks Dendy.

ZR: Thank you. It’s good to have that on the books. I want to thank you and that’s the end of the recording for now.

END OF INTERVIEW.